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*suggestive lessons for policy and theory*

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## **Two examples of the use of Habitus to understand processes of marginalisation: suggestive lessons for policy and theory**

Paper presented at the Conference ‘Beyond Bourdieu – Habitus, Capital & Social Stratification’, Department of Sociology, University of Copenhagen, Denmark, 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2009.

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This paper offers an evaluation of the concept of habitus from a policy oriented perspective, drawing on empirical material from two research projects; one on urban regeneration, and one on women’s working lives. Addressing different substantive areas, these projects found common strengths and weaknesses in applying habitus to understand processes of continuity and change in institutions and individuals’ lives. The concept provides a temporal and spatial framework that is valuable in explaining the embodiment and reproduction of inequality. Using habitus points to the importance of social relations and trajectories over the long term, suggesting lessons for social policy which frequently tends towards individualized and ‘quick fixes’ to embedded social problems. These insights include the complexity of interaction between forms of capitals, and between the institutional and individual domains; the tension between aspirations to change and resistance to transformation; and the importance of considering values in combating marginalization. However, in showing the complexity of processes of inequality it becomes difficult to derive lessons that are easily translatable into policy actions. Nevertheless, applying at least some minimal insights from using the concept may offer substantial gains in terms of developing effective policies.

### **Introduction**

Much has already been written on habitus, but still the concept seems to prove its worth: it keeps being re-worked and developed in new and interesting ways. This paper hopes to make an original contribution by not simply reiterating the well-worn paths of the advantages and disadvantages of the concept, but by showing that its empirical application leads to insights for policy makers with regard to changing processes of marginalization. These are lessons concerning the importance of the interaction of capitals, of value-based and emotional forms of investments, and of longer term horizon.

Habitus gets at the interaction between the micro and macro, ‘bridging the gap,’ showing how the person situated in social contexts comes to fit – or if in new situations – feels like a ‘fish out of water.’ Social structures become embedded within the person, at the same time as the person contributes to their reproduction. Separating the individual and society is like trying to separate two

sides of the same coin. We are simultaneously products of, and productive of, the societies in which we live. Habitus refers to an individual's way of being, acting and approaching the world:

...social agents are endowed with habitus, inscribed in their bodies by past experiences. These systems of schemes of perception, appreciation and action enable them to perform acts of practical knowledge, based on the identification and recognition of conditional, conventional stimuli to which they are predisposed to react; and without any explicit definition of ends or rational calculation of means, to generate appropriate and endlessly renewed strategies, but within the limits of the structural constraints of which they are the product and which define them (Bourdieu 2000: 138).

In other words, habitus points to the 'incorporation of the social into the body' (McNay 1999: 95), and vice versa. The concept is used by Bourdieu (1987; 1990) to account for the ways in which individuals' expectations and preferences come to reflect the objective conditions in which they were formed, such that:

Those who occupy the same positions have every chance of having the same habitus, at least insofar as the trajectories which have brought them to these positions are themselves similar...The dispositions acquired in the position occupied involve a sense of adjustment to this position – what Erving Goffman calls the 'sense of one's place' (Bourdieu 1987: 5).

As such, habitus has come under fire for being deterministic and for being unable to explain social change. But maybe it is timely that the 'stick is bent' this way rather than taking a post-modern-agency approach, which too often resonates in contemporary social policies. Here individuals are creators of their own destinies, judged independently of their social context, and often left with the handed down responsibility for changing their path. In any case, defenders point to the way Bourdieu's later work is relatively less deterministic than his earlier writings. In this paper, we argue for a nuanced reading of Bourdieu that reflects the complexities of dependencies and possibilities for change we have found in our respective research areas. The first project used in-depth interviews to explore women's classed and gendered trajectories through education and work, looking at how they saw their lives (past, present and future), and what orientations they demonstrated in approaching everyday life. The second project focused on neighbourhood regeneration and the strategies for combating spatialized social exclusion using a combination of interviews with residents and professionals and discourse analysis of policy documents.

We set about identifying how social patterns become produced, reproduced, changed, and resisted by looking empirically at real lives as they are played out socially. In doing so, we find it important to emphasise once more the view that people are both products of and productive of the worlds in which they live; a view that is too often forgotten in the enthusiastic approach of policies to individual transformation and ‘betterment.’ Consequently, in this paper we are much less concerned with theoretical implications than we are with *practical lessons* for policy.

Before turning to these empirical accounts we find it necessary to set the stage. With the danger of reiterating the rather voluminous debate on habitus, in the first section of this paper we lay out a few pointers to the way we approach this concept.

## **1. Approaching and appropriating habitus**

The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (Bourdieu 1990: 53).

Habitus is the principle that organizes practices and representations – the orientation to the world and the behaviour in it. It is constrained by the social world in which it is constructed and the differentiated relations of power within it. In Bourdieu’s terminology, power relations are conceptualised by the unequal possession of different forms of capital that bestow social position and value on those that embody them. There are different forms of capital: economic, social, cultural, political, linguistic and symbolic. The latter is the symbolically apprehended form of capital, that is, the (mis)recognised representations of capital (Bourdieu 1986). Capital in the form where the basis of the privilege it bestows on its holders is legitimised to the extent that it is naturalised and unquestioned. However, Bourdieu has a tendency to reduce social relations to a game for ‘profits’ that neglects the importance of other dimensions of relations built on commitments, emotions, or faith. It is important to keep these dimensions in mind when analysing women’s dispositions to work or local struggles in excluded neighbourhoods, which, although often related to the struggle for different forms of capitals, are not wholly reducible to games for profit.

Habitus is thus simultaneously constructed and constrained by the character and constellation of capitals, and represents the internalization of objective structures and conditions.

In directing attention to the way the past inhabits the present, as well as the future, habitus also conveys the ways in which individuals come to engage in certain practices not as the result of formal ‘decision-making’ processes but because they are enmeshed in particular contexts in which some courses of action are seen as ‘for them’, while other pathways do not reach the point of consideration. ‘Protension’ (Bourdieu, 2000) conveys the way in which individuals are embedded within specific social and economic contexts with access to different resources and thus consider different courses of action as the ‘taken-for-granted’ next step. This embeddedness in economic, social, and cultural contexts does not mean that habitus is a passive storehouse of practical knowledge. Rather, it is an orientation towards future action and possibilities (Moi 1991); an orientation that is structured by objective conditions in such a way that the most improbable practices are excluded as unthinkable (Bourdieu 1990).

Habitus functions both as the enabling device for acquiring new competencies, relations, abilities, and paths of action, and as a censorship as some pathways and routes of development become unthinkable. ‘Equal opportunities’ are therefore not equally accessible for any group or habitus. The relation to what is possible is a relation of power, since the social world is structured in categories of the possible and impossible for some groups, as well as what is already appropriated as possible for some groups. This comes both in forms of self-censorship and in terms of not having the sufficient capital to enter, or possibly even to be aware of, the arenas where development takes place.

The encounter between field and habitus is captured in the concept of the ‘feel for the game’:

...the conditions of entry that every field tacitly imposes, not only by sanctioning and debarring those who would destroy the game, but by so arranging things, in practice, that the operations of selecting and shaping new entrants (rites of passage, examinations, etc) are such as to obtain from them that undisputed, pre-reflexive, naive, native compliance with the fundamental presuppositions of the field which is the very definition of doxa (Bourdieu 1990: 68).

The practical mastery of the regularities, the grammar of practices, and the rituals associated with the logic of the game in a particular field are what makes ‘sensible’ practices possible. The

atonement of field and habitus is thus the embodiment and enactment of a deep rooted learning process. Our perspective on habitus thus requires this process to become more ongoing than what can be immediately read from Bourdieu's work.

We have found that habitus has to be understood as constantly under development, as a process rather than a static set of dispositions. This is particular important when studying individuals who move between different fields and have to acquire a new 'feel for the game'. When groups of people move across time and between fields their habitus is slowly transformed so as to form dispositions for practices which are not at odds with the logic of the new fields. In periods, such positions when encountering intersecting fields may experience 'torn' or multiple habitus (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). We will thus emphasise a reading of Bourdieu that allows for other forms of rationality to override the 'practical sense' of habitus, such as economic rationality or value based forms of rationality in situations when this seem to provide the most beneficial investment strategy.

The relational character of the concept of habitus is precisely what makes it difficult to apply to empirical contexts. Even though habitus is the embodiment of the social, our reading of habitus still has to take account of individual trajectories. These are products of social position but they are irreducible to such positions. This understanding of habitus thus allows for individual 'style' but acknowledges that this is constrained by the conditions of the social position, and therefore that it is likely to remain within the same 'manner'. Improvisation and change is possible within this perspective but limited by the horizon of possible paths open to habitus, which themselves are products of positions in the social field and the logic of the particular field. Where change does occur, the conditions and situations in which it takes place need specification. In many cases, rather than the outcome of rational planning or calculated decision-making, these conditions arise out of unexpected and unintended meetings or occurrences, disrupting the paths that individuals are taking and leading to the possibility of new routes, with accompanying dangers and potentialities.

Bourdieu draws attention to habitus as not only the product of individual history but of collective and institutional inculcation. Habitus is the meeting point between institutions and bodies. Everyone is always already inculcated with institutional knowledge, recognition and misrecognition and we constantly reproduce these knowledges in our daily practices, though not necessarily intentionally. On the other hand, habitus is also what bestows institutions and governmental practices with the

embodiment that makes the realization of these institutions and practices possible. Government practices and institutions are made viable not only through the materialisation in things but equally in bodies; in the dispositions of habitus (Bourdieu 1990:57-58). The orchestrating of habitus as the conducting towards particular dispositions often underlying the goals of labour market and social policy becomes, therefore, not only a question of moulding the habitus towards new possibilities but also of realising and legitimising particular governmental practices and institutions. This is visible, for example, in the recent spread of the notion of social capital development which refers both to a particular vision of the integrated individual and to a particular mode of governance that relies on the politicisation of social relations.

Bourdieu's notion of habitus has been criticised for giving too much emphasis to conditioning and being too deterministic in the weight given to objective structures and the role of social position (Lovell 2000). However, we want to argue for a reading of Bourdieu that emphasise habitus as a 'generative structure' (McNay 1999:100). Habitus is not formed once and for all, but develops through experiences in different fields. Habitus not only shapes experiences, it is transformed in the process; the case of upward or downward social mobility could be an example of this. This reading of Bourdieu is one that allows scope for reflexivity and deliberate action to resist and change the social situation. However, this does not mean that habitus is easily changed, since it produces inertia and excludes possibilities from the horizon, but that repeated action and the embodiment of new dispositions can provide possibilities for change (Sayer 2005).

## **2.1 Emergent and shifting dispositions towards work**

In the following, we employ a more 'micro level' focus to look at the ways habitus is embodied on an individual and everyday basis. The following examples are drawn from interviews with women across different classed and gendered positions – including working, middle- and inter-class (i.e. those who had experienced upward mobility from a working-class family background through education and employment) (Armstrong 2005). The in-depth interviews were conducted during the early 2000s in two locations in England to explore the different ways in which women conceptualised their work as employees and mothers, as well as examining the trajectories which had led to the positions they currently occupied. We use this material here to highlight particular patterns and observations which are suggestive of the ways we can rethink habitus, and indicative of

the way habitus can enhance our interpretation and understanding of individuals' positions and dispositions.

The following account suggests that the strength of the concept of habitus lays in its capacity to enhance understanding and to explain the women's particular dispositions toward their work. More specifically, we wish to show:

- a) that habitus can be conceived as a '**meeting point**' for different influences which encourages us to explore the specificity of classed and gendered processes and look at the ways they interrelate in different ways;
- b) that habitus can be thought of as a **process** that extends across the life-course of individuals as they move across and through different spaces;
- c) that habitus gives due regard to the importance of **history** in accounting for individuals' positioning in social space which, at the same time, shows the shortcomings of using thin descriptors such as 'choice'.

For those women from working-class backgrounds, there appeared to be a similarity between what was expected and possible in terms of their class position and their embodiment of a more or less "conventional" femininity. A shortage of capitals meant either leaving school at 16 to get a job or studying for a vocational qualification such as nursing or childcare. Going into higher education was not considered; it was not within their 'plausibility structures' (Skeggs 2004) as a possible – let alone desirable – course of action. These women recalled the pressure to get a job, which was often low status low paid employment, and where they were in a position of serving/caring for others. At the same time, their early adulthood was marked by relations with boyfriends with a view to 'settling down' – i.e. getting a house, and then having children. Their working class dispositions were both classed and gendered and seemed to imply a lack of power in the form of a shortage of capitals to do or imagine things differently. Moreover their dispositions were formed by being in relations of dependency and care-giving where space for 'doing their own thing' was constrained.

For the middle-class women, enacting a more 'masculine self' was possible due to their access to higher levels of capital. This entailed leaving home for university, enjoying their 'independence' and embarking on their career. These years of early adulthood seemed to allow departure from a traditional femininity where women are dependent on others financially and others are dependent



on women for care. Here, to a certain degree being middle-class meant being able to access and ‘do’ femininity differently. Indeed, some of the women recalled being surrounded by a strong feminist ethos when they were growing up.

For those interviewees who had experienced upward mobility through education and employment, their teenage years and early adulthood had been marked by disruption – periods of illness and unhappy family homes – and feelings of difference. Amongst these women there seemed to be rejection of the (working-class) femininities that they witnessed around them. We would therefore follow others such as Skeggs and Walkerdine *et al*, who have argued that socialisation into particular positions is always incomplete, that we do not all come to develop the dispositions expected from our objective position. However, it would not be accurate to say that these women had aspired to a more middle-class femininity. Rather, the future was more uncertain and their departure onto a different path came about through social links to others who provided an opportunity to step into and experience a different world. Interviewees reported feelings of ‘difference’ which involved dissonance or a ‘lack of fit’ between their self-identity and the positions that were expected of them by their family and peers. For example, Lynne’s enjoyment of school had set her apart from her siblings, and the attitude of her parents. She drew the following contrast:

My background, my family... didn’t go in for education... at all, you go to school if you wanted to, completely different. I always remember my mother, if we got up and it was really raining heavy, she’d say to us ‘oh you don’t have to go to school today, it’s raining’. That’s the attitude, and I thought I want to go to school and I used to go to school, my sisters were like, oh no, they wouldn’t, they’d stay at home. (Lynne, 42, inter-class, white)

Lynne remembered that she had always wanted to get married and have children. However, Lynne wanted a different relationship from those she had seen around her. She recalled a happy childhood growing up in a large family in Ireland but recalled that she had never wanted to marry an Irishman. Lynne explained:

I used to look at people... used to see them going into pubs, used to see young girls having children and thought I don’t want to be part of this, and I also always said I’d never marry an Irish man (laughs), I don’t know why... ‘Cos my father he was... fantastic, very, very caring. But to me Irish men, they didn’t really respect women as such, and drinking, becous’ they love their drink and whatever and I just always felt not part of that society... I don’t know why, that’s the way I felt, I just don’t feel part of this...

These experiences of dissonance indicate the way that individuals do not always adjust to their class location, acquiring dispositions consonant with their objective positioning in social space (Skeggs 1997: 81). Although the precise moments at which these women came to see themselves as different were not always easily identifiable, the important element seemed to be an event which was disruptive whereby the women's ways of being in, and thinking about, the world no longer 'worked' effectively. As Burkitt (2002) describes, this 'lack of fit' prompts the self to become reflexive of itself:

Those moments when habit breaks down or when habits clash and the self is forced to reflexively monitor itself and the context in which it is acting in order to meaningfully reconstruct with others both self and situation (Burkitt 2002: 220).

However, feelings of difference did not, in themselves, account for these women's departures from expected trajectories. Also necessary were social relations providing access to hitherto inaccessible economic, social, and cultural capital. Two of the inter-class women had applied to universities that their boyfriends were attending. Through their relationships, these women gained access to important 'insider information' (Bettie 2003: 152) about application processes and university life, knowledge that is taken for granted by more privileged families. Lynne's trajectory changed following a friend's offer for Lynne to join her working in Germany. At the time, Lynne was working in an administrative position and was using part of her wage to support her parents who were struggling financially. She refused her friend's offer since she felt obliged to continue supporting her parents. However, Lynne went on holiday to stay with her friend and during this period met her husband-to-be who persuaded her to leave Ireland. Lynne described her parents' reaction:

I went off, I gave up my job [in Ireland], I got good money on the job, my mother and father were furious, but I thought 'oh sod it', I felt I had to go... Just to try it, so off I went to Germany.

She then moved to England with her boyfriend and, following a series of catering jobs and short courses at a local college, got her first 'big job' in an insurance company which led to her promotion to management level.

It seemed easier and less painful for these women to adopt values and dispositions associated with a middle-class lifestyle when not under the 'classing gaze' of their kin and local communities. It seemed that to move on and up required that these interviewees had to 'leave behind' and distance themselves – geographically and psychologically – from their kin, similar to the observations made

by Rachel Thomson and her colleagues (2002) researching the lives of young people in a deprived area. Though the inter-class women had held diverse expectations of womanhood, it seemed that they shared a belief that the ways of ‘doing femininity’ they had witnessed growing up in working-class families were ‘not for them’. These women had attempted to live out femininity differently.

This embodiment was practiced in a somewhat trial-and-error manner since these women did not have a clear vision of the version of femininity to which they were aspiring. Some expectations such as ‘always wanting to have children’ conformed with those of the working-class women in the research, whilst other desires such as the deferral of motherhood appeared closer to the middle-class women’s expectations. In rejecting the versions of femininity associated with mothers, sisters, and peers, these inter-class women had rejected a model of womanhood that entailed being primarily a ‘nurturer’ rather than a ‘knower’ (Walkerdine 1990: 24). They wanted more than a home and family and wanted to live beyond the boundaries that seemed to limit the lives of the women around them. Such patterns suggest that habitus can be thought of as a meeting point or point of intersection – embodied influences of both class and gender – and the relation between these influences is not straightforward. Rather influences may pull in different directions at different times.

Secondly, in examining the women’s trajectories it became apparent that sometimes they had developed new dispositions – different from what they themselves expected. Some of the women developed an increasing commitment to their paid work – contrary to their earlier expectations. For instance, Sophie recalled that she had believed that she wanted to be a full-time mother at home when her children were young. However, during this time increased hours of paid work came about through financial necessity, because her husband had left her after accumulating a large debt and with two children to support. But she enjoyed her work as a physiotherapist and had continued to work full-time hours as well as taking up further study. She said that even now, when her partner made comments that she would find it hard to give up her employment, she knew that at one level he was right, but still found it difficult to imagine herself in this way. As Sophie explained:

My life’s been a shock to me, what I’ve had to do, from what I set off to do, I would have loved to just stay at home, I think. [My partner] says no, I would have never stayed at home, but I don’t know, I think because I’ve had to change so much, you sort of adapt. But originally I know I never thought I’d have to work so hard (laughing). But I do like my work, I do like people, you know, just being with people. (Sophie, 39, working-class, black)

However, for other working-class women, being employed in jobs that were low paid and low status meant that such shifts in the evaluations of paid work relative to their mothering work were unlikely.

For some of the women, motherhood seemed to offer pleasures that had not been anticipated. For example, both Laura and Melissa had come to enjoy motherhood, experiencing it as something that allowed them to be someone, to be valued in a way that was not dependent upon achievements or qualifications, where they could enjoy time with their children. Though the other side of that was the amount of labour that children brought which was not shared equally with their partners who remained full-time – and worked overtime – in paid work. However, the appreciation seemed to emerge only following a period of engagement in ‘doing’ mothering. The early years appeared to have been fraught with tension. Laura found it difficult to adjust and experienced severe post-natal depression, while Melissa struggled in a difficult relationship with her manager at the architects’ firm where she worked part-time.

I realised when I was at home with the children... [that] being at home with children is probably the most worthwhile job that you can ever do... I was probably quite glad that I had that chance to [realise], I’d had such a bad experience with working part-time that made me leave it all and become a full-time parent, I think maybe that was really good that that happened. (Melissa 36, middle-class, white)

In both these cases, while not wishing to undermine the validity of their enjoyment or to reduce it wholly to a rationalisation of their position, it did seem that they had been constrained in their ‘options’. For both, mothering in the societal context of gendered structures had meant a reinsertion into a more conventional femininity where they became primary caregivers with pleasures, but also with potential costs in that their careers and financial position became undermined – and these costs were not generally borne by their partners.

By highlighting how class and gender processes interact in different ways according to individuals’ circumstances and the social contexts in which they live, these examples again suggest an approach to habitus as a meeting point. They point, for example, to the importance of allowing for processes of change in women’s dispositions toward work. While some of the middle-class interviewees had unexpectedly realised satisfaction in the role of mothering, the experience of some of the working-class interviewees such as Sophie showed the way a greater role in paid work over mothering can

arise. Crucially, these illustrations also point to the fact that, rather than work patterns being outcomes of (pre-existing) preferences or ‘choices’ (Hakim 2000; 2002), time spent in paid and unpaid work can change with circumstances and the ensuing experience of being in an occupational or mothering role can give rise to shifting dispositions. Moreover, these examples draw attention to the emergent character of dispositions, and demonstrate that forms of explanation have to include these women’s complex experiences. Perhaps this is a somewhat banal point but one that seems to be forgotten in policy discourses on lacking labour market attachment, which often invoke a simple form of ‘choice’ as explanation. It would also appear that we need to view habitus as an ongoing process extending over the life-course of individuals, which is something that Bourdieu arguably underplayed.

At the same time, however, using habitus prompts us to look backward to examine how history comes to be embodied and seems to set constraints on the extent of change and how it is experienced. Both Laura and Melissa harboured the desire to return to their ‘careers’. It seemed that both were looking forward in a way that suggested they wanted to get back the independence and satisfaction associated with the employment they had experienced prior to child-rearing. Despite their expressed enjoyment of mothering, their previous experiences had allowed them to sample a different way of life, which they missed.

Even amongst those interclass women who had achieved higher status positions through higher education and promotion in employment, the lack of belonging they experienced was clear from their accounts. Their feelings of insecurity seemed to be a direct result of their uneasy positioning of being between a working and middle-class position. As Lawler (2000) writes with regard to the upwardly mobile women in her sample:

Their ‘feel for the (middle-class) game’ is relatively weak, and this is manifest in their expressions of lack. All of these women might be able to ‘pass’ as middle-class, but there remains within the self a continual reminder that the habitus claimed is not one which can be fully inhabited; that the dispositions implied (by the habitus) are not fully possessed (2000: 114).

Nevertheless, amongst the inter-class women interviewed for this project, there was an appreciation of their paid work in terms of the opportunities it had brought – for autonomy, independence, and status. This explicit recognition of the privileges of being in higher status employment seemed to

come about through a contrast with the struggle associated with their earlier experiences. In other words, the pleasures had not become taken for granted.

The inter-class interviewees tended to have difficult relations to kin, and they struggled to articulate their feelings about the parents and siblings they had ‘left behind’. It seemed that these women did not wish to criticise the lifestyles and occupations of their kin, but simultaneously recognised that what they had – in terms of their jobs, house, and leisure – was in certain respects ‘better’. On the one hand, there was an attempt to explain the distance in terms of just being ‘different’. On the other hand, there was the uncomfortable acknowledgement of inequality and the guilt that accompanied it. These feelings may be indicative of the interviewees’ attempts to navigate the terrain of the unjust character of class inequalities, that economic worth and cultural difference are not reflective of moral worth (Sayer 2005).

## **2.2 Fighting marginalisation through regeneration**

The following is from a research project concerned with comparing neighbourhood regeneration policies in Denmark and England (Fallov 2006). More specifically, this research project compared the rationalities of the regeneration policies and their implementation in two sites: Hathershaw & Fitton Hill in Oldham, and Vollsmose in Odense. The project arose from the question concerning the similarities of the responses to spatial exclusion in the two countries despite very different welfare regimes and local-central welfare practices. What was common to both was a governmental rationality of governing through the capacities of the excluded, the habitat of the excluded,<sup>1</sup> and the governors responsible for facilitating the process of capacity development. This common rationality is played out in different practice regimes in the two countries, which among other things mean that there are significant differences in the mobilization of local community and in the role of the state. We will not go further in to these differences here, (for a more detailed discussion, see Fallov 2009, 2010).

Improving the habitat is not only a question of improving worn down social housing; it is also a strategy that entails producing a neighbourhood space that facilitates community interaction and

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<sup>1</sup> The regeneration policies work through a two-way logic in that changing the habitat will change the inhabitants’ composition of capital by aggregately enhancing social and economic capital, at the same time as the change of people is thought to have a positive impact on the symbolic capacities of the habitat; improving neighbourhood image and connections to included places.

participation from the local community. This is thought achievable through building community centres and places where residents can interact, as well as involving local residents in the planning and implementation of physical, social, and symbolic regeneration. Therefore, enhancing the capacities of the neighbourhood is closely related to the strategy to facilitate inclusion through inducing the capacities of active citizenship. Underlying this is a perception of active participation on behalf of the residents as inducing not only responsibility for their own and their neighbourhood's self-governance, but also abilities that enhance residents' employability and general democratic competencies (Falloo 2006).

In the following we will refer to two related examples from this research project of the unintended consequences of this appreciation of active participation. These are not included in order to question the merits of local engagement and empowerment oriented local and national policies, but to discuss the usefulness of the concept of habitus for analysing the dispositions and capital perceived necessary to engage in active participation. Both examples point to the importance of developing particular cultures (Bang 2004, Dean 2003) and acquiring particular forms of cultural capital in order to participate in regeneration work. The first example is an institutional perspective; the second is concerned with the participation of residents.

In both cases the reality became a top-down created bottom-up approach or, rather, a very limited and partial bottom-up approach. The methods of engagement in the planning phase in both countries were based on consultation, while they differed in regard to the engagement in the delivery phase. In England, engagement rested on direct election of resident representatives; while in the Danish case, engagement of residents rested on an already existing system of representation. These are mainly already existing activists drawn from democratic structures in the social housing associations.

In both countries, the institutional capacity for engaging the public and experimenting with other forms of participation varied between local authorities departments. These new forms of government have to engage with institutional traditions and set structures, which form the way government actors understand and act (Bevir, Rhodes & Weller 2003, Healey et al. 2002), as the new experiments often overlap with or overlay, rather than displace, existing government structures and ways of thinking (Barnes, Newman & Sullivan 2004). More direct forms of participation

collide with the expectations and experiences of representativity of local government officials. In other words, participatory forms of government have to be played out in relation to and engage with the existing institutional habitus. There are many interesting aspects to this concerning the problems of democratic accountability in relation to the transformation or reproduction of existing power struggles, and issues concerning effective coordination and resource synergy in the quest for partnership building. Here we are focusing on the importance of government actors sharing the same frames of reference (Magalhães, Healey & Mandanipour 2002) and the problems stemming from when the project oriented habitus challenges the bureaucratic. The project oriented habitus' disposition is to question the ethos behind the operational workings and the allocation of ownership. It values flexibility, process, and change. Conversely, the bureaucratic habitus is oriented towards getting things implemented through effective solutions. When these different habitus are forced to interact in local steering committees the meeting results in culture clashes. A local authority professional in Denmark tried to explain the problems the project consultants face in the following way:

we have had the feeling that they have not understood the rules of the game. You can like them or not, but you have to understand in the first instance what they are. One hasn't understood the rules of the game in the local government system and therefore a lot has been lost or missed its target...when you start missing each other than you use a lot of resources on learning to know each other's culture and rules.

The 'rules of the game' refer here to the understanding of how decisions and negotiations about initiatives are made, thus to the ability to engage with other professionals in an appropriate manner. Dispositions of practice have emerged in relation to ensure collaboration and minimising trespassing on the remit of other departments. This involves not only questions of who to consult in what matters, and whom are conceived to be legitimate partners, but also the timing and framing of new ideas. These culture clashes have meant that the institutional structures of regeneration have had to develop new common codes for engagement:

I want to say in relation to the Steering group that it has taken two years to reach a proper forum in which a fair amount speak the same language. That process could have ended sooner if we earlier had established the tools that enabled them to do that, and made ourselves understand them better. Because one of the barriers has been that they think that we are not bureaucratic enough, understood the systems too little. It has taken too long to figure out what it was they meant when they said what type of bureaucracy they had. (Local project consultant, Vollsmose)



The institutional structures of regeneration therefore, have to develop a particular form of cultural capital. The professionals working with regeneration need to acquire the abilities to speak a common language and share their horizons of understanding. In both projects the general feeling was that this was a possible but long term task. This involves not only developing common codes that make collaboration among professionals possible, but also developing institutional structures and practices that makes the inclusion of resident representatives achievable. The practical suggestions from the two case studies therefore included a break with the experimental character and short-termism characterising neighbourhood regeneration and localized efforts to combat social exclusion. This approach constantly makes these initiatives/efforts to empower local government structures at odds with the demand to achieve efficiency and visible results. As similar studies have likewise shown, the other side of the project orientation's openness and flexibility is a quick change over of staff resulting in the loss of personal relations and social capital as well as the loss of detailed situational and locally specific knowledge. Some of these suggestions are already incorporated in the effort in both countries to mainstream these regeneration projects, but these processes raise other concerns about the selection of initiatives to mainstream and the local involvement in such decisions. The two case studies point therefore to the importance of not underestimating the significance of the development of institutional cultures and habitus. In the two cases, they practically worked with this by actively changing attitudes, dispositions and practices of involved professionals, developing joint knowledge foundations and strategic horizons through study trips and cross-departmental group development. Moreover, their experiences suggest the importance of developing institutional structures in which the allocation of political competencies is clear, thus endowing these structures with the political capital necessary for meaningful participation in regeneration work.

In both regeneration projects studied, it was difficult to engage local residents on a large scale. Particularly, respondents reported problems with engaging ethnic minorities. This is something that both Governments are keen on changing; particular with the English Government the recent debates on multiculturalism and institutional racism play an active role here. The solutions suggested concern overcoming language barriers and central control with the local governments' active policies on this area. Locally, professionals from both sites pointed not only to barriers in the form of language difficulties but also to the necessity of other forms of communication. In both cases, they had projects concerned with developing local media (local TV, mobile phone services, and

local news letter's), and teams trying to collect opinions through face-to-face contact. The local studies also revealed that difficulties in reaching particularly ethnic groups could only partly be explained by stigma, language exclusion, and institutional racism, although all of these factors play a part. To get a voice at all for these groups likewise concerned the capacity to speak the dominant language of regeneration and democracy, knowing the curriculum of regeneration and local democracy.

When we come with our debate meetings, it is not only because we start at Danish times, we have become better at not planning it at praying times and so on, but when we come with our way of creating debate with a panel and a discussion, then we are missing the mark. Then we are catching the Danish group, and maybe especially that Danish group who knows someone who is engaged already, since they are at the meeting I will come too. (Local project consultant, Vollsmose)

There are two interrelated points expressed in the above: on the one hand, there is the question of acquisition of the curriculum of regeneration (Bernstein 1996); on the other hand, there is the importance of networks and social relations for inclusion in the regeneration process. Regarding the first point, inclusion in the regeneration process is not only about bodily presence, about sitting at the table, it is also a question of speaking the language of regeneration. To have a voice in the process one is required to know about how the process works, whom to talk to and when to speak. This idea derives from Basil Bernstein's theory of pedagogic modality, which he advanced in regard to inclusion in schools. He states that the concept is usable in any social context where cultural production-reproduction takes place in order to analyse the processes of symbolic control that regulate the modality of the practice (Bernstein 1996:17-18). The idea is that to have influence and be heard you not only need to have a seat in the organs of power, and have knowledge about the regeneration process, but also be able to speak the legitimate language of regeneration (and to act accordingly). The legitimate language of regeneration is not a fixed language but something that develops in the process via a combination of the classifications made, i.e. categorisations of regeneration, neighbourhood, participation etc., and the framing of the interaction between the actors; the organisation of meetings, timing and spatial organisation. This is exemplified both above and in the example below:

and the foreigners, especially the youngest ones they are very interested in it and take it seriously, but they are not at all educated and not used to sit in this kind of forum...when he came in just to see the room they were going to sitting in; 'oh shit', just to be placed in such a room with chairs and tables that are proper, just the fact of being there. (Project consultant, Vollsmose).

The categorisations of residents combined with the spatial organisation of public meetings and procedures of participation codes the relations between involved actors in culturally specific ways, which makes it easier for some groups to participate than others.

The acquisition of the code and curriculum of regeneration is necessary for all actors involved, but many ethnic minorities are disadvantaged in the differential acquisition of the code. Part of the code, such as common knowledge of the democratic system, is transmitted and acquired through early socialisation in schools and families, and in this process many ethnic minorities have a disadvantaged position.

I think... that it has something to do with that if you come from another cultural setting then the understanding of that you not only are part of a democracy, but that you can enter the decision process at an early stage, can be difficult to understand. Or maybe not understand, that seems so negative, as if people are somewhat stupid, you simply don't know this. That communication, that learning, which many of our foreigners receive at language schools and so on apparently never get to this. (Project consultant, Vollsmose)

It may be argued that the habitus of ethnic minorities shapes their dispositions and makes it harder for these groups to acquire the curriculum of regeneration. Not only is it more difficult for these groups to acquire the necessary code, but their habitus also shapes their aspirations and in some cases active participation maybe placed outside the horizons of possibility. As one interviewee expressed:

...I think they are uncertain of what demands they can raise in different areas, and what they can expect of, for example a local authority representative. They do not know...they do not know what a person from the local authority represents.

Being active in the articulation of what is needed in the area is not seen as the thing to do in these groups, and this leads to the self-exclusion of these groups. The assumption shared by the interviewees is that ethnic minorities need what Bourdieu terms forms of cultural capital that are transmutable into symbolic capital, that is, are legitimate from the perspective of the dominant national cultures (Bourdieu 1991, Skeggs 2004, Carter 2003). Ethnic cultures are not valued as symbolic capital in the orthodoxy of the host cultures' democratic institutions and forms of participation. Their cultural capital does not enable entry to the routes of influence. This example also points to the naturalisation of cultural explanations and the naturalisation of the access points and gatekeepers of access to the capacities of inclusion (Bourdieu 1991:277). The cultural

knowledge of democratic practices and forms of participation is transmitted in places to which ethnic minorities often do not have the same kind of access. In contrast, these forms of practices are taken-for-granted by professionals and such naturalisations become embodied in their habitus making it harder for them to imagine a ‘third space’ (Bhabha 1990) with other forms of participation, and thus also with a different valuation of cultural capital.

The lessons from these two case sites suggests that bringing in new arenas and ways of engaging residents in order to make the regeneration project more locally responsible and to develop residents’ capacities for active citizenship unintentionally reproduce existing boundaries. Involved professionals end up in dialogue mostly with those groups of local residents who are already active, rather than those groups that the effort was intended for. In other regeneration projects experiments with democratic schools have been made in order to counteract the marginalised position of ethnic minorities (the INTERLOC project in Aalborg Øst – [www.interloc.aau.dk](http://www.interloc.aau.dk)). This is certainly one route to take. Another path is to work with innovating new ways of engagement in order to dispense with the barriers of tacit knowledge structures in the bureaucratic field through which the ability to grasp bureaucratic rules (Bourdieu 2005) becomes the gatekeeper for participation. Such innovative ways of engagement would demand a change away from the insistence of representativity in the constructed public to be engaged with and open to other forms of organisations emerging from below. Good intentions of empowerment in these policies risk being wrecked if the importance of cultural competencies and cultural differences are not taken more seriously in a way that does not try to minimise conflicts but learn from them. Such learning processes also involve sensitivity to the inertia of institutional dispositions in the structures which are to facilitate regeneration, and thus orchestrate local development towards inclusion.

### **3. Conclusions**

The above examples have shown habitus to be a valuable theoretical and analytical tool for understanding the way the social position of marginalised groups – whether on the labour market, in the home or in excluded neighbourhoods – is the result of complex interaction between individual trajectories and social conditions, and of how these interactions are played out in everyday practices. We have argued that the relational character of habitus makes it a valuable tool for analysing the importance of social relations for processes of marginalisation – choosing particular

paths of inclusion might bring about social mobility but have often severe costs for the mobile individuals (and their families). At the same time, social mobility and participation in active citizenship are dependent on the development of particular forms of relations deemed legitimate from the dominate logic of the relevant field. In the examples given we have attempted to highlight how processes of exclusion are fruitfully understood as a relation between exclusionary practices, resulting from the logic of particular fields, and processes of self-exclusion as some paths to inclusion are outside the horizon of possibility for particular groups. The misrecognition of these forms of self-exclusion as questions of a lack of initiative or ‘choice’ fails to see that it is not enough opening particular paths to inclusion by valuing certain forms of participation whether on the labour market or in regeneration work without attention to whether and how such paths can become possible for the groups intended. Furthermore, we have emphasised the importance of analysing the way processes of marginalisation are related to how institutional practices, norms, rules and routines become embodied in persons, as well as how this embodiment itself legitimises such practices. Deploying a conceptualisation of habitus as a generative structure makes it possible to show how particular practices which are deemed necessary to counter processes of marginalisation rest on the development of certain sets of dispositions, competences, and capitals.

We would suggest some key ‘lessons’ on the basis of these research projects:

Firstly, policy makers need greater attention to the value dimension of policies. We argue for a need to be sensitive about the implications of valuing particular cultures of participation, and practices of work and care. Such valuations result in sanctions from outside and from within that result in the reproduction of existing boundaries of marginalisation. Policies need to be more embedded and empathetic to how people invest emotionally in ways of being; how residents get attached to places, and the way people value their social, familial, and peer relations. In turn, these investments are developed over time, and in particular circumstances; they are meaningful, and require explanation in and of themselves. Policy needs to attend to these values, what are people ‘leaving behind’ and why is it of value? Likewise, what assumptions are being made by policy makers? Paying attention to such questions may aid understanding the particular resistances that are encountered.

Secondly, policies need to be attuned to the interaction of influences from relations of class, ethnicity, and gender. We have argued for a perspective on habitus as a point of intersection. The

influences of class, gender, and ethnicity intersect and overlap in complex ways. They do not always draw dispositions in the same direction but can result in conflicting and contradicting dispositions, which may also converge and diverge at different points in the life-course. We have shown this in regard to how the conflict between gendered dispositions and the dispositions arising from new social positions resulted in ‘multiple’ and ‘torn’ habitus. Furthermore, we have argued for the need to be sensitive to the way different forms of capitals interact. For example, how social capital interacts with economic and political capital, and the way acquiring cultural capital necessary for inclusive forms of active participation is dependent on particular forms of social capital. Injecting large sums into deprived neighbourhoods does not make these included spaces alone without necessary political attention to the importance of social networks and cultural specific ways of being. Conversely, building social capital cannot magically produce inclusion without financial support and the creation of real employment possibilities.

Thirdly, policies need to depart from the tendency to operate on limited timescales and demand quick fixes to complex problems of marginalisation. We have shown that social change comes about over long periods. To understand what brings about social change, focus needs to settle on the importance of individual trajectories over time and across spaces; how experiences and relations made at different times in the life course bring about new dispositions and possibilities, but also raise barriers for transformation. We have shown that bringing about change at the local level demands attention to the importance of reaching common horizons, frames of reference, and common knowledge in institutional structures, which comes about over the long term.

Thus, we suggest that the concept of habitus provides valuable insights for policy arenas which tend to focus on the individual, and the short term. Habitus brings the social back into the individual by highlighting the importance of connections between capitals, social relations, and cultural practices, and between institutional, and physical and social environments.

In a final statement on the importance of these lessons from using the concept of habitus for the policy world, it is worthwhile reiterating something Bourdieu once said in defending the concept against the criticism that it entails an overly socialised view of subjects: (1997: 132):

I would like to invite you to ask yourself why this notion, in a sense very banal (everyone will readily grant that social beings are at least partly the product of social conditionings), has triggered

such reactions of hostility, if not rage, among some intellectuals, and even among sociologists.

What is it about it that is so *shocking*?

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